



The Energy Story

Chapter 14: Biomass Energy

Biomass is matter usually thought of as garbage. Some of it is just stuff lying around -- dead trees, tree branches, yard clippings, housing rubble, left-over crops, and bark and sawdust from lumber mills. It can even include trash, paper products and other household waste you'd normally send to the dump in your weekly trash pick up.

This stuff nobody seems to want can be used to produce electricity, heat, compost material or fuels. Composting material is decayed plant or food products mixed together in a compost pile and spread to help plants grow.

California tops the nation in the use and development of biomass technologies. Imagine -- each year, more than 1.4 trillion pounds -- **a lot** -- of biomass is burned to produce electricity. This cuts back on the need for other energy sources.

Biomass produces about 2.77 percent of all of California's electricity. That's enough electricity to light a city the size of San Diego.

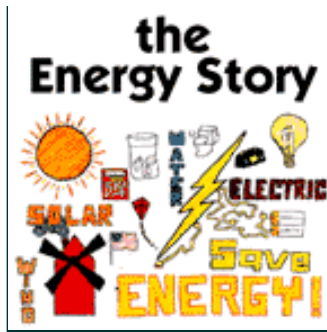
Using biomass does not add to global warming. Plants use and store carbon dioxide when they grow. This is then released when the plant material is burned. So using biomass closes this cycle of storing carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide is a gas that, when there's too much, can contribute to the "greenhouse effect" and global warming.

Biomass can be recycled and made into other products such as paper and fertilizer. Because biomass is reused and recycled, less garbage is sent to the dump. Less land is needed for "landfills" to hold the garbage.

And the use of biomass is environmentally friendly because the biomass is reduced, recycled and then reused. Today, many new ways of using are still being discovered. One way is to produce ethanol, an alcohol fuel for cars. Another way is to change biomass to combustible gases for electricity production.

The wood or biomass pellets you burn in a wood stove are other examples of using biomass to produce heat energy for your home.

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